

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of December 19, 2020

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Peter J. DeMasi (Fire Chief), Lawton Rutter (Ambulance Chief), Bruce Wright (Cemetery Maintenance Contractor), and Trent Tucker (Highway Foreman).

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- a. Fire Department.** Chief Peter J. DeMasi said the proposed FY 2021/2022 budget for the Northfield Fire Department (NFD) is very straight-forward with only minor increases (if any) in most line items. For example, the budget for Personnel Services has only a \$40 (0.1%) increase from the current fiscal year. In Contract Services, there will be a \$920 (4.7%) increase due to slight increases in the line items for Recertifications and Dispatching. Chief DeMasi noted the Dispatching line item will increase from \$16,840 to \$17,560 and this is mainly due to planned upgrades in Capital West's dispatching system. The cost of dispatching Northfield first responders is split between NFD and the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS). The Administrative budget, which covers phone service, radio repair, etc. will see a \$130 (1.4%) increase. In Material Supplies, there will be a \$1,800 (6.7%) increase mainly due to an additional \$1,000 for vehicle maintenance and an additional \$600 for department supplies. The other Administrative line items have little or no increases. Chair Maxwell had read in a newspaper article that the cost of local dispatching services would become significantly more expensive over the next couple years. Chief DeMasi said the increase for individual departments will not be as high as originally feared. The increased cost is largely related to dispatching technology upgrades that will result in better transmission to more rural areas. There also will be a different broadcasting frequency that will result in clearer and more reliable reception.

In the NFD Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget, the Building Improvements account has a \$331,73 balance with \$5,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. Manager Schulz said many renovations have been done at the Northfield Fire Station over the past couple years with a new roof, heating system, windows, etc. The building now is in pretty good shape. Chief DeMasi agreed but added the building's bathrooms still need to be upgraded and some new siding needs to be installed. In the NFD Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget, Chief DeMasi noted there is a \$4,429 balance in the hoses/pumps account with \$6,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. He noted some of the current hoses are in poor condition, which can lead to a drop in water pressure when used, so he has been replacing them over the past couple years. Chief DeMasi felt the accounts for the scheduled replacement of pagers, radios, air pacs, and thermal cameras were in good shape with sufficient new funds allocated in the FY 2021/2022 budget. The aerial tower truck is scheduled for replacement in FY 2027/2028 and Chief DeMasi plans to purchase a good used vehicle at that time for about \$450,000. The account for this purchase has a \$148,713 balance and the municipality will be adding \$11,500 in FY 2021/2022. Norwich University (NU) also will contribute \$20,000 annually towards this purchase as part of its current agreement with the municipality. The 1993 tanker truck is being replaced this year with a new vehicle that should be in service by July 2021. The replacement of the two (2) pumper trucks are scheduled for FY 2028/2029 and FY 2038/2039 and Chief DeMasi felt sufficient funds are being budgeted each year (\pm \$10,000) for this purpose. The Select Board members had no questions for Chief DeMasi. Chair Maxwell thanked him for today's presentation.

- b. Ambulance Service.** NAS Chief Lawton Rutter noted his O&M (operations and maintenance) budget for FY 2021/2022 is largely unchanged from the current fiscal year with an overall increase of 4.7%. There is only a 1.7% increase in the Personnel Services budget and Chief Rutter noted many of the extra workhours incurred over the past few month due to the COVID-19 pandemic should be reimbursed at some point.

The Contract Services budget will increase by \$11,060 (17.2%) in FY 2021/2022 with most of this attributable to a \$9,000 increase in the ambulance billing services line item. As regards the aforementioned technical upgrades to the dispatching services, Chief Rutter felt this was about ten (10) years overdue and should eliminate a lot of dead areas in radio coverage. He noted there now are some rural areas, such as Roxbury, where transmission and reception is very poor. The budget for paramedic intercept is projected to increase from \$8,550 to \$9,000 but the actual cost of this in the next fiscal year is dependent on what Barre Town Ambulance ultimately decides to charge for this service. Chief Rutter said various options have been discussed but there remains a good level of uncertainty. The Administrative budget, which covers telephone service, postage, office supplies, etc., is mostly level-funded with only a \$360 (0.9%) increase. The only significant increase is in the radio repair/maintenance line item and this is due to higher costs of maintaining some of the older analog radio units. The Materials/Supply budget will increase by \$1,900 (4.4%) and most of this is attributable to the increase in the medical supplies budget from \$20,000 to \$21,000. Chief Rutter felt this was due to what has become an annual increase in calls for NAS response and much of this added expense will be reimbursed through patient insurance.

The NAS CIP budget consists solely of the Building Improvements account, which now has a \$5,515.76 deficit with \$6,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. Chief Rutter noted there had been extensive renovations in the NAS section of the Town Garage over the past year and this resulted in the overage. The new funding will cancel the deficit and allow sufficient funds for minor building repairs in the next fiscal year. In the NAS CEP budget, Chief Rutter felt the accounts covering the scheduled replacements of the two (2) defibrillators in FY 2024/2025 have healthy balances (\pm \$6,000 each) and the funds allocated in coming fiscal years (\$7,500 each) were sufficient to fully fund the future purchases. The two (2) AutoPulse CPR machines are scheduled for replacement in the next fiscal year and the combination of the current account balances and new funds will cover the purchase price (\$16,000 each). The replacement of the 2014 Ambulance unit is scheduled for FY 2022/2023 and the 2017 unit in FY 2026/2027. These purchases will be accompanied by the purchase of new radios and PowerLoad ambulance cot lifts. These have their own separate NAS CEP budgets. Two (2) ambulance chairs will need to be replaced in the next fiscal year and the funds are on hand. The radio replacement account has a \$4,723 balance with \$7,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. This account covers both the radios installed in NAS vehicles and portable units. There is now a problem in that NU has switched over to all-digital radios while NAS mostly has analog units. This means direct communication between NU and NAS is sometimes impossible. Chief Rutter looks to replace the analog radios with new digital ones over time. The new radios are estimated to cost an average of \$910 each.

As he has during budget meetings over the past couple of years, Chief Rutter said could not overstate the need to purchase a PowerLoad unit as soon as possible. Northfield EMTs face serious risk of back or other injuries when physically loading patients, including increasing numbers of morbidly obese, into the backs of ambulance units. He himself is nursing a knee injury due to this. Chief Rutter would like the PowerLoad unit planned for purchase in FY 2026/2027 bought now and installed on one of the current ambulance units. Chair Maxwell asked how much extra this would cost in FY 2021/2022. Chief Rutter said there is a \$8,000 balance in this account and the PowerLoad units cost about \$29,000 each. Therefore, about \$21,000 would need to be added to the budget.

Board member Stevens asked about the increase in cost for ambulance billing services. He had been under the impression there would be savings when the municipality switched billing providers but the opposite seems to have happened. Chief Rutter said it was felt the former provider was not efficient when it came to collecting overdue bills and charging for extra services performed and medical supplies used during ambulance calls. The new billing provider does charge more upfront but does a better job of collecting this revenue. This added revenue more than compensates for the additional initial expense. As for the rising costs of dispatching services, Manager Schulz noted the Town of Randolph used to pay White River Junction Ambulance more than three (3) times what Northfield was paying Capital West Dispatch for similar services. Although their changes have increased in recent years, Capital West Dispatch still remains a relative bargain and the best local option. Chair Maxwell then thanked Chief Rutter for appearing this morning and wished him the best of the holiday season.

- c. **Cemetery Department.** Manager Schulz said Bruce Wright has a contract with the municipality to maintain the public cemeteries, which includes mowing the lawns, making repairs, removing problem trees, performing verger duties, etc. Manager Schulz said the Cemetery O&M budget has a \$30 increase in FY 2021/2022 so is basically level-funded. Mr. Wright then provided a brief overview of his activities over the past year as well as his plans for the next couple years. This includes installing new fencing in the Falls Cemetery, new mapping for Mount Hope Cemetery, fixing the South Gate at Mount Hope Cemetery, painting the Loomis Cemetery fences, etc. These projects would certainly improve the cemeteries' appearance and would be good for the community. Mr. Wright felt the cemeteries are in overall good shape. Manager Schulz said the Cemetery CIP budget shows the balances in the accounts established for long-term cemetery repairs and renovations. There now is a \$12,331 balance in the Mount Hope Cemetery Expansion budget. As there are no immediate plans for cemetery expansion, Manager Schulz would like to transfer \$1,000 of these funds into the Stone/Monument Restoration budget and \$2,000 into the budget for improving the road that runs through Mount Hope Cemetery. He believes the balances in these accounts are sufficient to perform Mr. Wright planned projects. Mr. Wright agrees the proposed funding should be sufficient. Chair Maxwell then thanked Mr. Wright for his good work throughout the year and wished him the best of the remaining weekend.
- d. **Town Highway.** Manager Schulz said the overall Highway O&M budget is looking at a \$25,420 (2.5%) increase in FY 2021/2022. The bulk of this (\$22,720) is related to payroll increases that are specified in the employees' union contract. The Contract Services budget will see a \$4,200 (15.7%) increase that is almost entirely due to \$4,000 to have catch basins cleaned out. New state mandates regarding stormwater control makes this a necessary expense. An outside contractor should be able to come into Northfield for a couple days and complete the work. The Administrative budget is level-funded and the Materials/Supply budget will see a \$25,420 (2.5%) increase. Most of the line items in this budget are level-funded or will see slight increases. The sand budget will increase from \$65,000 to \$70,000 based on past actuals. Since salt prices have stabilized over the past couple years, Manager Schulz sees no need to increase its \$65,000 budget in FY 2021/2022. Manager Schulz then noted the Highway Department did have a significant surplus at the end of FY 2019/2020, which he attributed to relatively good weather and restraints on discretionary spending due to concerns about how the COVID-19 pandemic would affect the local economy and municipal revenue collection. Highway Foreman Trent Tucker said he is comfortable with the proposed O&M budget and there should be sufficient funds for needed projects in FY 2021/2022. Manager Schulz then turned to the proposed Highway CIP budget. He noted a \$14,470 balance in the Guardrails account with \$5,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. He felt there are a number of roads that need new guardrails installed this coming summer, especially Lovers Lane. Mr. Tucker cited Dole Hill Road and Little Northfield Road as other possible recipients of new guardrails. The Bridges account now has a \$173,047 balance and, as recommended by Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, will be subdivided with dedicated accounts for three (3) bridges (Stony Brook Road, Main Street, and Pleasant Street) that will require rehab/replacement in coming years. Manager Schulz still has hopes that a Structures grant application to the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) will be successful in the coming year. This grant program was suspended last year due to state budgeting delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The expected replacement of the Main Street Bridge will be an expensive project (\pm \$4,500,000) with Northfield expected to pay a local match amount between \$225,000 and \$450,000. Should the municipality agree to all or most of VTrans' recommendations regarding bridge design, traffic rerouting, etc., the local match amount should be closer to the lower end of the spectrum. In order to start paying for this eventuality, Manager Schulz would like to put \$100,000 in the FY 2021/2022 budget for this purpose. Manager Schulz said the Ledge Removal budget has a \$9,275 balance and \$5,000 will be added in FY 2021/2022 to address some problem areas around Northfield. The Sign and Post budget has a \$2,526 balance that will be roughly doubled with a \$2,000 addition in the next fiscal year. The Retaining Wall CIP account has a \$55,302 current balance with \$20,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. The main focus for this account would be addressing the retaining wall on Elm Street, which has seriously deteriorated over the years. The municipality is considering several options including a total rebuild, which is estimated to cost about \$400,000. Less expensive options, such as installing sheet pilings, would be in the \$100,000 range.

The Sidewalks CIP budget should have a \$8,507 balance after the South Main Street project has been completed so an additional \$40,000 will be budgeted to replenish this account. The Drainage CIP budget has a \$14,723 balance with \$5,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. One proposed use for these funds is the installation of catch basins, etc. along Slate Avenue before that street is repaved next summer. The Paving budget has a \$15,929 balance with \$150,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. Slate Avenue and Central Street are expected to be the major paving projects next year. This should cost a total of \$200,000 so additional CIP funds may need to be added to the budget or transferred from other accounts. The Gravel/Resurface budget has a \$90,000 balance with another \$90,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. This will allow a total of about three (3) miles of backroads to be resurfaced next year and this will include sections of Stony Brook Road, West Hill Road, and Turkey Hill Road.

Board member Miller is concerned we may not be budgeting enough money for the Stony Brook Road Bridge rehab/replacement project. The bridge is in very poor condition and he doesn't feel we should rely on VTrans to provide sufficient grant assistance. He would like this discussed further during a budget recap and review session. Board member Miller also feels the Drainage budget may need to be increased to pay for needed drainage work on Central Street before it is repaved. Manager Schulz said state funds are expected to cover at least half of the Stony Brook Road Bridge project. If state funds do not become available, the municipality may have to bond to pay for this project, which is expected to cost in the \$300,000 range. As for Central Street, the cost of drainage work there should be lessened by reusing some of the old curbing from South Main Street that was removed during the sidewalk project. Also, the cost of drainage work on Slate Avenue will be split evenly between the Highway and Sewer departments. Manager Schulz said it might be advisable to add an additional \$5,000 to \$10,000 to the Drainage budget in FY 2021/2022 but it was his original thinking that the planned \$5,000 addition was sufficient.

Manager Schulz said the Highway CEP budget will increase from \$153,960 to \$231,120 in FY 2021/2022. This increase is mainly due to new CEP accounts being established for the scheduled FY 2025/2026 replacements of the excavator and the loader, which were in a lease/purchase agreement until this year. In addition, the 2014 Western Star dump truck will have a new chassis installed in FY 2021/2022 so \$27,150 is being budgeted for its future replacement. Mr. Tucker said highway equipment is in overall good condition. The 2014 Western Star is no longer under warranty so this would be the best time to replace the cab and chassis to reduce future maintenance costs. He added that the truck body and plow equipment would be retained. The purchase of the new chassis will cost about \$100,000 and the current balance in this CEP account is \$99,886. Manager Schulz asked how many additional years should we expect from the excavator and loader. Mr. Tucker said both were in fairly good shape and should last another five (5) to seven (7) years. Mr. Tucker then noted the current grader, a 2004 John Deere, is scheduled for replacement in FY 2027/2028. He thinks it would be a good idea to retain this grader when the new one is purchased so Northfield will have two (2) on hand. Mr. Tucker feels the amount of non-paved backroad in Northfield really is too much for one grader. In addition, the used "Tag Along" trailer purchased in 2011 and is scheduled for replacement in FY 2021/2022. The expected cost is \$10,000 and there will be sufficient funds on hand when the current account balance (\$8,500) is supplemented by \$1,500 in the FY 2021/2022 CEP budget. Mr. Tucker said the MV2 sidewalk machine is operating well after an overhaul this past fall. It is not scheduled for replacement until FY 2024/2025.

Manager Schulz noted the replacement of the vehicle lift at the Town Garage has been a contentious issue for a few budget seasons. The current vehicle lift was purchased in 2008 and projected to last for twenty (20) years but has had a number of issues for some time. Mr. Tucker agreed it is in bad condition and the fact it is German-made means parts are expensive (if they can be found). His current plan is to replace it with four (4) portable lifts but options are still being reviewed. Manager Schulz said the replacement of the vehicle lift is scheduled for FY 2022/2023. Mr. Tucker will try to keep the lift in operation for another year using custom-made parts, etc. Board member Miller thought the consensus during the last budget sessions was to purchase two (2) portable lifts now and purchase another two when budgeted in a year or two. Mr. Tucker would prefer to wait for the purchase of all four (4) as there is a significant discount when a complete set is bought. Also, two lifts can be used for smaller vehicles (i.e., police cruisers, ambulance units, etc.) but not for the heavier highway or fire trucks.

Board member Miller thinks this matter should be revisited in budget recap. Perhaps it is time to budget for four (4) portable lifts and put the current vehicle lift out of its misery. Chair Maxwell agrees that might be the proper course if there are serious safety concerns involved. He feels employee safety should be the paramount concern.

Board member Stevens had some questions about the O&M budget. He asked why we were renting a "Pit Lot" for an annual expense of \$3,000. Manager Schulz said it is a road sand storage location in South Northfield off Vermont Route 12A. This is intended to reduce highway truck mileage and employee time by eliminating the need to drive to and from the Falls pit when working in the southern part of town. Board member Stevens then asked about the Equipment Rental line item, which has a \$10,000 budget. Manager Schulz said this account was used to rent a roller and a second grader this past summer. This really helped when the backroads were being worked on.

Turning back to the Highway CEP budget, Board member Miller asked about the \$149,156 balance in the 2006 International dump truck budget as its replacement doesn't seem to be scheduled. Manager Schulz said \$128,000 of these funds were used to purchase a 2020 Chevy salt truck. The rest of these funds will be used to start a replacement budget for the new truck. Board member Miller asked if the new salt truck would be in service this winter. Mr. Tucker said it was still at the dealership but could be on the road by the end of January 2021. Board member Goodrich has concerns about Mr. Tucker's recommendation to retain the current grader when the new one is purchased. She noted there have been expensive repairs associated with this grader recently so this might not be a very cost-effective action. Board member Goodrich also doesn't see sufficient funds being budgeted for the scheduled replacements of the excavator and loader. She would like these matters discussed during budget recap.

- e. **Grounds/Parks/Facilities.** Manager Schulz said the Grounds/Parks/Facilities O&M budget will decrease by \$1,420 (2.9%) in FY 2021/2022. This is mainly due to reductions in the health benefits line item as there has been a change in personnel (i.e., the Grounds/Equipment Operator) in the past year. The other line items are mostly level-funded. In the Grounds/Parks/Facilities CIP budget, Manager Schulz would like to add \$2,500 to the Equipment/Facility Repair budget, which now has a \$536 deficit due to extensive work done in the municipal parks this past summer. No major repairs are expected in the coming year and we are still waiting for recommendations from the Recreation Committee regarding the baseball dugouts in the Northfield Falls Park.

In the Grounds/Parks/Facilities CEP budget, Manager Schulz noted the half-ton 2011 Chevy used by the Grounds/Equipment Operator is in very poor condition and Mr. Tucker has looked at replacement options. Mr. Tucker said when undergoing state inspection, the truck was found to have a broken frame so it cannot pass inspection. He reached out to Chuck Williams, who is in charge of state pricing for municipal vehicles. Mr. Tucker feels the truck should be replaced with a vehicle that can be used for winter plowing as well as summer maintenance. He would like a single-axle one-ton truck with a snow plow in front and a rear sander. In the winter, a part-time employee could be hired to plow the roads with it while the Grounds/Equipment Operator is busy clearing sidewalks with the MV2. The price should be in the \$46,000 to \$48,000 range, which is about a \$15,000 discount. Manager Schulz said we tried to keep the 2011 Chevy in service as long as possible and the purchase of the new truck can be financed either through borrowing or transferring funds from other Highway CEP accounts. This can be discussed during the budget recap and review sessions.

Board member Stevens asked if it was feasible to save money by purchasing a used truck for the Grounds/Equipment Operator. Mr. Tucker said if this truck will be used for winter road maintenance, it probably should be a new truck with a warranty. Used plow trucks are hard to find and those available usually have a lot of wear and tear. In the long run, it probably would be more cost-effective to buy a new truck, especially at the discount prices available through the state. Board member Miller remembered there was discussion last year of buying a new truck for Mr. Tucker in a year or two and letting the Grounds/Equipment Operator have his current one. Is this still a possibility? Manager Schulz noted Mr. Tucker drives a ¾ Ton 2018 Chevy that is scheduled for replacement in FY 2024/2025. The estimated replacement cost is \$50,000 and there only is a \$16,354 current balance in the CEP account. Therefore, whichever way the Select Board members decide to proceed, additional funds will be required to make a vehicle purchase in FY 2021/2022.

Chair Maxwell asked why the Select Board members are only finding out about this now. Why wasn't this request included in the draft budget that was distributed last month? Mr. Tucker said the failed vehicle inspection only happened last week. In addition, the Select Board members were informed a year ago of the vehicle's poor condition and it was their decision to keep it in operation for another couple years. Manager Schulz said the vehicle problems discovered during the inspection were much worse than had been suspected so the Select Board recommendation did not work out. Had this been known in time, a replacement plan would have been included in the draft budget. Chair Maxwell asked if we really need another Highway employee to properly take care of our streets in the wintertime. Manager Schulz said this would be a part-time snowplow operator who would be paid out of the dedicated Highway O&M line item. \$8,000 is budgeted for this purpose in FY 2021/2022. Mr. Tucker said the goal was to speed up the downtown plowing. After big storms, Water/Sewer Department employee James Russo already helps by clearing out the Depot Square area. Board member Miller, who serves on the Highway Planning & Project Oversight Subcommittee, will develop a proposal on this matter that he will forward to Manager Schulz. It then can be discussed during a budget recap and review session. Board member Morse said the Budget & Financial Review Subcommittee (Select Board members Goodrich and Morse) will be meeting next Tuesday morning (12/22/20) and this matter can be discussed then as well.

- f. **Brown Public Library.** Manager Schulz noted the O&M budget for the building that houses the Brown Public Library (BPL) and Northfield Historical Society will increase by \$2,190 (5.3%) in FY 2021/2022. Most of this increase is due to an additional \$1,300 in the Elevator Maintenance line item. The other line items are either level-funded or have small increases. For a discussion of the library operations budget, Manager Schulz turned to Board member Stevens, who also serves as Treasurer on the BPL Board of Trustees. Board member Stevens said the BPL Board of Trustees is asking for a \$2,000 increase (from \$106,500 to \$108,500) in the amount the municipality provides for library operations. Board member Stevens said this increase is partially due to expected reductions in BPL fundraising activities in FY 2021/2022 due to COVID-19. He noted the current fiscal year saw a big drop in revenues as the Labor Day Book Sale was cancelled and the Annual Appeal fundraiser was curtailed. There have been savings in the electricity and heating budgets as the library has been largely closed to the public in recent months. Employee work hours have actually increased in some cases in order to start the outside pickup of books at 8:00 a.m. Board member Stevens said the BPL building was briefly reopened to customers by appointment but this had to end with the recent COVID-19 upsurge in Washington County and Governor Scott's reimposition of earlier restrictions. Four (4) to five (5) BPL employees now work regular hours to process book requests but no one else is allowed in the building. There were no questions about the proposed BPL operations budget.

Chair Maxwell then asked the other Select Board members how they wished to proceed from this point as all the departmental budgets have been discussed at least once. He suggested the scheduled December 29, 2020 budget meeting be used for the initial recap and review of the draft FY 2021/2022 budget. Board member Stevens agrees with this and would like a discussion then of remaining issues in the Town Highway budget. Board member Miller feels some items in the Police Department budget also need some resolution. Board member Goodrich would like to discuss the request from Economic Development Director Jon Ignatowski for about \$12,000 for the professional construction of a promotional website for Northfield. After a brief discussion, the Select Board consensus was to focus on the Highway Department budget at the next budget meeting (12/29/20) and further discuss the Police Department and Economic Development budgets at the following one (01/05/21). Board member Morse said his subcommittee probably will discuss some of the more contentious budget items at their meeting next week (12/22/20).

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

- V. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 12, 2021.